

A Mother's Advice by luxuriousvoyage11

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Summary:

Karen's first time meeting El prompts her to share some important advice for her son.

A Mother's Advice

She had wanted to be an author. All her life, she was in love with the idea of making stories and characters and giving them conflict to overcome; but when her father had met the 22-year-old businessman with a steady job, she knew those dreams were a fleeting memory. Karen and Ted Wheeler wed in 1965, a beautiful ceremony that spoke of love and happiness and being lucky enough to meet your soulmate.

Of course, she came to love Ted to some degree, being that he was the father of her three children; but was she in love with him? Was he her soulmate? Absolutely not. She wasn't even sure she believed in such a concept anymore.

Second to her love of writing, she was a reader of, specifically, romance novels. She figured she loves the genre so much because of the lack of affection and passion in her own marriage, sad as that may be.

She's trapped in a gripping read about a second chance romance when the front door flies open, her middle child barreling through.

"Goodness, Michael, slow down!" Karen chides, placing her open book down on the coffee table in front of her.

"Oh, sorry mom, I-uh- nevermind, um my friend's are coming over later if that's okay?" Karen nods, a tad confused as to why he's even informing her.

It was a Friday night, after all, and usually, Lucas Sinclair, Dustin Henderson, and Will Byers would just waltz in with Mike and stay in her basement until the late hours of the night.

"Sure," she smiles, "the boys?"

Mike nods before his cheeks turn the slightest shade of red, "and Max and El."

She remembers the name Max or, more so, the way the name fell

from a young man's lips last November at her front door. She found herself to be disappointed when she had never seen him again but then reprimanded herself for even thinking such things about a boy probably still in high school; still, she hadn't felt...electricity like that before.

She had met the redhead girl several times in passing from the living room to the basement and she seemed tough and more than capable of holding her own against the four teenaged boys.

But the other girl, El, she had only heard the name whispered in the fort when Mike was downstairs alone or overheard the boy's talking about her in the basement when she'd pop her head down to make sure everyone was alive.

"I finally get to meet El," Karen said with excitement.

Mike let out a bashful smile of his own, relieved to see his mom was eager and not suspicious. It was now May, six months after El came back and, as far as Karen knew, she was adopted by Hopper last Halloween and introduced to the boys through Will.

Francine Miller had told her the distraught chief had been looking for a "replacement daughter" and coincidentally worked on a foreign case that landed him with an adoption offer; the situation seemed off but she felt it wasn't her place to push for answers. She figured as long as the girl had a good home now, that's all that mattered.

As for the party, they had been finishing up their last year of middle school and making bi-weekly visits to Hopper's cabin. On this particular Friday night, however, Hopper was short an officer and needed to work late to catch up on mundane cases and paperwork, giving Mike the perfect opportunity to finally have El as a welcomed guest in his home.

The boys and Max arrived a few hours later, Karen greeting them as they charged towards the basement. "I can order a pizza for you guys if you want," she called down and was met with cheers.

She let out a tiny laugh as she walked over to the phone and ordered two pizza pies. Only ten minutes later did the bell ring and Karen

shook her head in confusion, surely that couldn't be the pizza?

She heard her son come barreling up the stairs, almost knocking right into her had he not skirt around her as he ran to the door. "Michael, I told you to slow down in the house!" she reprimanded, hands on her hips.

"Sorry mom," he said, sounding more rushed than apologetic. The door opened and a tiny brunette stood outside, her face brightening when she sees Mike in the entryway.

"Hi, Mike," she said.

"Hey, El," he says, "come in."

Her son had gone through a major growth spurt throughout the last few years, towering over her as well as his father; but this girl just barely reached his chest and had to look up at him to smile.

She was wearing a pair of overalls cut into shorts, beat up converse and a white tank top under to keep her cool in the warm spring weather. Her hair was shorter than most teen girls nowadays, but it's still a cute curled hairstyle that's an inch or two away from meeting her shoulders.

"Hi, El," she says softly, "I'm Mike's mom, Karen."

The girl looks around wearily at the house, almost as if she's seen it before and is noticing the subtle changes Mrs. Wheeler had made in the decor.

Mike moves closer to her side, his arm brushing hers and El turns her head to the smiling woman in front of her.

"Hi Kar- Mrs. Wheeler," she corrects, remembering Hopper's lecture about manner's in the car, "I'm Jane but you can call me, El."

The mother is confused as to how she got the name El from Jane but then figures maybe her middle name is Eleanor. She also notes her odd accent, though she can't pinpoint exactly where it's from.

"It's lovely to meet you, El," she responds with a smile, "I just ordered

pizza for you guys, it should be here any minute."

The girl nods and moves further into Mike, moving her hand around to finally meet his. Karen feels her gaze travel down to their intertwined hands before landing on her son who, while blushing, doesn't pull his grasp away.

Instead, he tightens it and moves his thumb over her hand calmly - the gesture alone tugs at Karen's heart.

"Okay, we're gonna meet the guys and Max downstairs," Mike informs his mom before whisking El away.

While she's walking back to the couch to retrieve her book, she hears her son mumble "I missed you," at the top of the stairs.

She can't help but let out a small smile before returning her attention to the book.

The pizza arrives and she sets the table, now preferring everyone to eat upstairs after finding a moldy piece of pepperoni between the basement couch cushions a few months ago.

She can't help but observe the group from the kitchen, animatedly talking and laughing while they inform El about their week in school.

She doesn't miss the soft way Mike observes El as she's giggling or how physically close the two always need to be as if one of them is gonna vanish at any moment.

They finish the two boxes of pizza and head into the den to watch a movie while Karen cleans up and gets Holly ready for bed. Once the toddler is bathed and read to sleep, the woman goes into her room where Ted Wheeler is snoring away.

She lets out a sigh as she looks over at her husband before entering her connecting bathroom to run a bath. She remembers she left her book in the living room and creeps downstairs, not wanting to disturb her son and his friends.

She's shocked, however, when she hears soft whimpers and a muffled

"shh," through the dining room. Not wanting to disturb anyone, but her curiosity getting the better of her, she slowly peaks her head around to see El's face in her son's chest, his hands gently rubbing up and down her back. His lips are against her head and he's swaying them back and forth.

She knows she's gawking at what's meant to be a private moment but she can't tear her eyes away. She's never seen this soft side of her son, cradling this girl like she was made of glass.

"It's okay, El," he reassures, "just relax, okay?"

Her shaking shoulders halt after a few moments and she pulls back, Mike immediately wiping the wetness from her face.

"Sorry," she hiccups, embarrassed. Mike just shakes his head and runs his hand down to her chin, giving her a chaste kiss.

Already totally invading their privacy, Karen advertises her gaze and grabs the book from the table a few feet away before jogging up the stairs and turning off the running water.

She soaks in the tub away from wifely duties and clueless husbands and reads until the water grows cold. She changes into a silk pajama set and notes that the time is 10:30, walking down the stairs in her slippers to see an emptied den.

Mike and El are standing by the door in an embrace, El's head on Mike's chest and turned so she sees Karen standing by the stairs. The mother feels embarrassed, again, to catch her son and his...friend until El pulls away from Mike and cautiously walks over to her.

"Thank you...for the pizza," El says, enunciating every word, "and for Mike."

She can't help but giggle at the soft spoken girl and her blushing son, placing an arm on El's shoulder gently.

"You're welcome El, I hope to see you again soon," she says before squeezing El's shoulder lightly and saying goodnight.

Karen busies herself in the kitchen while Mike kisses El goodbye,

watching her walk down his driveway and into the police cruiser.

He shuts the door and lets out a sigh before meeting his mom in the kitchen. They share a moment of silence until Karen can't help herself.

"So, is El your girlfriend?"

Mike resists the urge to roll his eyes, "mooooom," he groans.

She lets out a soft cackle and shrugs her shoulders, "I'm just asking, Michael!"

She wasn't expecting any more of a response from him so she's blown away when he mumbles a quiet, "yes."

Karen gives him a soft smile and she puts her hand atop his, "well, just remember to treat her right, okay? Listen to her and always make sure she knows how much you love and respect her," she tells her son.

In the back of her mind, it nags at her that maybe, just maybe, that's the kind of advice she wishes her mother-in-law would've told her son.

"Course mom," he says right before a big yawn interrupts him, "I'm going up to bed, night."

Karen swallows the lump that formed in her throat before mumbling, "goodnight, Michael."

The exhausted mother passes down the hallway, noting Nancy's bedroom is still empty and Holly is still sound asleep under her fuzzy blankets.

She makes her way into her bedroom and lays on the cold, left side of the bed, hoping and praying that if there's one thing Mike learns from her, it's the advice from moments ago.